

MISSIONS IN THE NORTH-WEST.

AN INTERESTING LETTER FROM THE REV. JOHN
McDOUGALL.

We are permitted to publish the following interesting letter, addressed by the Rev. John McDougall, Methodist missionary, to the Hon. James Ferrier and the officers, teachers and children of the St. James street Methodist Church afternoon Sunday-school:—

To Hon. James Ferrier, Superintendent, Officers, Teachers and children of St. James street Methodist Church afternoon Sunday-school:—

DEAR FRIENDS,—In my last, Sunday night found us at the mouth of Ghost River. Monday morning we moved up the Valley of the Bow, and stopping for dinner near the present site of Morley mission, we spent the afternoon exploring for some convenient spot to winter in. After riding around on either hand for some hours, we concluded to go back on the hill, some three miles from the river, and locate temporarily on the banks of a beautiful little lake, where we found timber and grass and water most convenient.

The next morning we moved up the hill to the place we had selected, putting up our tents; all hands went to work with a will to make homes for the winter. And as we not only required shelter from the cold and storm, but also protection from wild men, we planned our buildings in the form of a square with all the doors opening into the square, so that the outside of our walls was as a timber fort.

Chopping down trees, hauling them to the spot, putting up shanties, plastering the walls, building chimneys, whipsawing lumber, interviewing and being interviewed by natives, doctoring the sick, holding services, thus our time is spent and our hands are full of work from the very word go.

Seven days, and the first personage in the whole of the Bow River country, (an immense district) is ready for use. As I am bringing Mrs. McD. up to the house to make arrangements for moving in, you, my young friends, had better come with us, and learn how to make a home in a new country, and do it in a hurry. You will not all be able to go into the house, but there is any amount of room in the big out of doors we have about us on every hand. The house is 25x18 feet inside, and about 8 feet high from ground to ridge. Half of this building we have floored, and we have made a chimney in the floored end, and in the unfloored part we have put up our cooking stove. As we have no glass our house is lighted by two parchment windows. This parchment is made of the skins of deer killed near us while building. As we have not a single article of furniture except a looking-glass and my home made writing-desk, there is not much difficulty in arranging these, and yet small and furnitureless as our first mission house is, how glad we are to leave the smoky leather lodge we have spent the past few week in, and grateful to get better shelter before the winter storms come. In the meantime the other buildings in connection with our fort are going up, our mission party taking two sides of the square. Already we have had a visit from the Blackfeet. They had come to see what we were about. They had been urged to prevent our planting a mission in the Bow River country; they ought to run off our stock, plunder our supplies, do worse, rather than let us stay in the country. All this had been urged upon them by men themselves professing to be missionaries. We knew of this, and also of the lawless character of these Plain Tribes, and therefore

we had identified ourselves with the Stonies; we had told these mountain men that now we were with them our interests were common, and that they must let these Plain Indians know we were together. Already the Plain Tribes, though mortally hating the Stonies, had found out that they were not to be played with; that while they were taught not to act on the offensive, at the same time they were determined on the defensive, and often, though caught in small parties, they had turned to fight the overwhelming numbers of their foes. Thus we felt that while our chief dependence was in God, we also had a "strong power" in our allies, the Mountain Stony. We told the Blackfeet we were glad to see them, to have the opportunity of making their acquaintance, and to tell them that we were sent into this land to be the friend of all men, and to do good to all as much as lay in our power; that we were children of the same Father, and He wished us to be at peace. We pointed to the effect of the Gospel on the Stonies; for many years they had not gone on the war-path, and now their strong desire was to live at peace with all men. Altogether our interview with these wild men was satisfactory, and they went back to their people in a different state of mind from that in which they came to us.

Very soon it became necessary for our Indians to move off to their hunting grounds; their food as well as revenue of all kinds depended altogether on the chase. Accordingly the Stonies began to scatter. Some went north to the head-waters of the Saskatchewan, others south to the boundary line and beyond. Some struck into the mountains, and with the exception of a few straggling tents, we were soon down to our original number. Just at this time quite an item in our experience occurred. The winter had broke upon us, and in the midst of a big snow storm we were quite startled by a good-sized party of Bloods and Blackfeet coming down upon us. As the storm was raging we could not do otherwise than receive them into our houses; anything else in the beginning would have been a poor evidence to them that Christianity is better than heathenism. To be crowded and to be continually on the alert (for these men were well armed, in fact, some of them better than we were)—this we thought we could stand for two or three days, but worse was to come, something we had not dreamed of. It happened in this way. One of the party who came with us from Edmonton (a French-mixed Blood) had unknown to us brought with him a keg of whiskey, and it was afterwards

very mortifying to us to think that often on the way out we had in bad places pulled and shored at the cart in which this abominable stuff was being freighted. This fellow's cupidity could not resist the temptation to trade horses with our visitors, and on the second night of their visit he began dealing out his liquor. About a third of the party—the chiefs and older men—were sleeping in the kitchen and of our house, when all at once we were awakened by noises and shooting; and brought right up with the fact that a big drunk was taking place right on our premises. We at once determined that those who were in our house should not join, and securing the door we kept out all who tried to come in. No wonder Mrs. McD. and our children were alarmed, for the noise and tumult outside was something terrible. When the morning dawned we were not slow in giving vent to our indignation to both Half-breed and Indians, the former for deceiving us, and the latter for forgetting they were our guests. The Half-breed plead guilty and plead for mercy, the Indians plead ignorance of wrong-doing, and said that when they met white men almost everything was whiskey or rum, and they thought getting drunk was a virtue, but they said they were sorry to have caused a disturbance at our establishment, and now, as they knew we did not have anything to do with liquor, they would not trouble us in like manner again.

Our visitors having gone home, we found that our stock of meat was getting low, and this was the staple, for we had very little flour and no vegetables whatever. In such circumstances we must bestir ourselves; horses are driven in, carts are mended, harness is looked over, and if broken stitched; guns attended to, ammunition packed, and everything prepared for a trip which may occupy two weeks or extend two months.

My brother and self, each with a man, and the two Englishmen I mentioned in a former letter, made up the party. It was not without a little anxiety that I left Mrs. McD. and my children. The isolation in Mrs. McD.'s case was a stern reality, she being the only white woman in a country 560 miles wide. But this was not all; the unsettled state of the Indians was the great source of dread. However, we felt we were in the path of duty, and that was enough. Many were the lonely days and nights of the mission family at Morley during the first years. When we started there was very little snow, but as we got out into the big plains to the east the snow got

deeper, until it became very heavy wheeling. As the country into which we were going was new to us we had to explore for a road as well as travel. We had a leather lodge with us, and when we thought we were leaving the last wood we put some in our carts and pushed on out. On the evening of the fifth day we sighted some buffalo, and were glad to see that they were heading towards the timber. From a little hill near our camp I could see several thousands. This was Saturday night and we stayed until Monday morning. Our stock of provisions was now very small, but the buffalo, our "stand-by" for the present, were now only from 10 to 15 miles away, and in sight. Sunday was a day of rest, also, in a sense, a day of loneliness. While multitudes of our friends in the east were listening to the glad chime of the Sabbath bells, and flocking into their beautiful churches and attending the numerous and well equipped Sunday schools, the smoke of our solitary camp fire was the only evidence of the presence of man anywhere to be seen in all our vast surroundings.

Monday morning we could still see the buffalo moving toward the woods, so getting ready we started. After travelling several miles we left the whole team of carts with the Englishmen, while the others of us caught up our buffalo runners; these had hitherto been driven loose. Saddling up carefully, we then examined our guns, and then rode on ahead of the brigade. Extreme caution must be taken not to alarm these herds, otherwise you will have to run your horse a long way, and after all not come up or be able to kill. Getting as close as we could, without letting them see us, at last we came out into full view. The nearest band started; there were several hundred in it; the snow was about a foot deep on the level, and in the drifts from two to four feet deep. The band, when they saw us, made the snow fly in a thick cloud behind them. Galloping up with our horses well in hand, we came near this cloud of snow, and then gave the word to charge! Away jumped our eager horses, and shutting eyes and mouth, men and horses disappeared into the cloud. It was not long before we made through it; and here were the prey right before us, with their winter coats on, and every muscle stretched in flight; they all seem to be in good condition, and right here the skill of the hunter is well tested. He must pick his animal, do this quickly, and keep his eye on the one he wants, or he will lose it in the moving mass before him. This must be done under difficulties. At the time I write

of the thermometer would gauge from 10 to 15 below zero, snow flying, buffalo falling, your horse jumping ravines, and fallen buffalo, yourself strongly aware of the fact that your horse may at any moment put his foot into a badger hole—(these abound), and then where would you be?—but you and those depending on you must have food, and on you go. That morning I shot and secured three fat cows, my man one also. The others did well, and we had no mishap, for which all were exceedingly thankful. At this season the days are very short, and by the time we had these animals butchered and hauled into camp, the tent up, &c., it was dark. It would not do to leave the meat out, for the large prairie wolves were numerous and bold, and we had learned, by bitter experience, not to leave our meat within their reach. As it was, they kept up an incessant howl around us. The next day, though it was much colder, we moved camp, made another hunt, killed several buffalo. This time my horse fell twice with me—once my gun disappeared in a snow drift, and I had quite a time finding it. The next time I was charging over the brow of a hill, the snow had blown off, and the frozen ground was pretty hard to come down on, and I did not feel like running any more that day. The third day in the buffalo, I saw a large band to the homeward of our camp, and hitching up we started after them. Providence favored us, the weather abated, and that afternoon we secured all we could take home. We had made a big turn in our trip, and now we must go the straightest way we can home. Thursday morning, bright and early, we are rolling westward. Saturday, at noon, we are still 35 miles from our home. My brother suggested that I should go on and try and get home that night. We were short-handed with our teams but he and the rest said they would do their best and away I went. It was after dark when I came to Ghost River. In going out we had forded this through the slush and ice, and now it was frozen over. After tying my horse and trying it, I found that because of outflowings it was wider than usual and the ice was like glass; my horse was not afool; how was I to get him over? At last a thought struck me. My little horse was very intelligent and also very quiet, and I got beside him and stretching out my arms, the little fellow leaned against me, and I slid him across. Poor little Bob, he was our favorite; for eight years incessant travel and adventure, he was our standby; were we hungry we put the saddle on Bob; was the ground rough and full of holes and my horses likely to fall we took

Bob every time; had we a long day to put in Bob was our choice. I once rode him and another horse alternate 100 miles between daylight and dark.

My father had used him a great deal and thought as much of him as I did. Father had a horse we called Jack; these two, Bob and Jack, were general favorites with all our family. Some wonderful deeds of heroism had they done and helped others to do also. The last work they performed was a sad one. After we found my father's frozen body we put it on a sleigh to take it home; this occupied a day and a half. When we came to the last stage Jack was put into the shafts and the saddle was put on Bob, and he was ridden by the friend who led Jack; thus the mournful train came to the mission, the saddle and harness were taken off them, and after a few days, during which we buried our father, search was made for the horses (both Bob and Jack were in good condition when turned out). Bob was found dead, cause not known, Jack was found sick, and we could not help him, and he died also.

Very strange, we thought, and for this reason you will pardon my relating these things.

After getting safely across Ghost River—Bob and I, we proceeded up the valley; we had still 6 miles to put in, 6 miles up the valley of the Bow, and 3 climbing the hill to our mountain home. The night was very dark, no road to be seen, but thanks to an all-wise Creator for the gift of a large bump of locality, we had no misgivings, and in a short time we were inside the fort, and under the low but welcome roof of our home. Under such circumstances all are glad; anxiety about the absent, whether at home or away, gives place to a calm and peace truly enjoyable. The next day our Sabbath services were seasons of refreshing; quite a number of Indians had come in, and they eagerly drank in the word proclaimed.

Tuesday our party arrived with the meat, and once more our larder was full. More to follow.

Yours, faithfully,

JOHN McDUGALL.

